

Recording Calving Difficulty Scores

Calving Ease EBVs provide an estimate of genetic differences in the ability of calves to be born unassisted from 2 year old heifers and are calculated from three main sources of information - calving difficulty scores, birth weights and gestation length records. By far the most important of these sources are calving difficulty scores.

1. Why should Calving Difficulty Scores be recorded?

Calving difficulty has an obvious negative impact on the profitability of a herd through increased calf and heifer mortality, slower re-breeding performance and considerable additional labour and veterinary expense.

Whilst many large studies have consistently shown birth weight to be the most important genetic factor influencing calving difficulty, there are also other aspects that need to be considered. For example, calf shape, pelvic area and calving “will”. Recording calving difficulty scores allows for all these contributing factors to be evaluated and subsequently, the best possible genetic improvement made for ease of calving.

2. How do I record Calving Difficulty Scores?

Calving difficulty should be measured at birth by visually scoring females on the following scale of 1 - 6.

Score	Code	Description
1	Unassisted	Cow calved unassisted / No difficulty
2	Easy Pull	One person without mechanical assistance
3	Hard Pull	Two people without mechanical assistance One person with mechanical assistance
4	Surgical Assistance	Veterinary intervention required
5	Mal-presentation	Eg. Breech
6	Elective Surgical	Surgical removal of calf before the cow has the opportunity to calve

* Note that a blank score will not be interpreted as “unassisted”. Instead, it indicates that calving difficulty was not scored

3. What considerations should be made when recording Calving Difficulty Scores?

- ❑ If you regularly check your cows (e.g. on a daily basis), it is reasonable to assume that a cow who calves without assistance between visits can be considered as unassisted (no difficulty) even though you did not see her calve.
- ❑ Record a score for all calves rather than just difficult or easy births. Scores should be recorded for dead calves, if possible.
- ❑ If calving difficulty score is either blank or [0], it is interpreted as no score recorded rather than "no difficulty".
- ❑ There needs to be some level of calving difficulty in the herd for the scores to be used effectively by the BREEDPLAN analysis. That is, simply scoring all births in a herd with a calving difficulty score of [1] will not identify any genetic differences in ease of calving.
- ❑ As with birth weight and gestation length, a birth weight management group should be recorded if there are different treatments of the females prior to calving that may affect calving difficulty. For example, where one group of cows have had different feed availability.
- ❑ When calculating the Calving Ease EBVs, calving difficulty scores of [3] and [4] are grouped together. Calving difficulty scores [5] & [6] are excluded from the BREEDPLAN analysis as the problems are considered non-genetic in origin.

4. How do I submit Calving Difficulty Scores?

Calving difficulty scores should be submitted to your Breed Society/Association when submitting your calf registration details. Please contact your Breed Society/Association should you have any queries about how to submit this information.

For more information regarding how to record calving difficulty scores, or calving ease EBVs in general, please contact staff at BREEDPLAN.